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## **REPRESENTATIONS OF SWEARING IN THE SOCIETY: A CONSEQUENCE OF SOCIAL FACTS**

**Abstract:** This paper presents swearing usually depicted as derogatory or a way of expressing frustration, resentment or any similar feelings not as the mere result of a permanent nonconformity to the rules of language by its users in their respective milieu be they politically, socially or culturally motivated, but the consequence of a phenomenon above their control, which are social facts. I argue that social facts, viz., laws, language, religion, age or marriage, uncontrollable by individuals in nature, though produced collectively by them, influence the way individuals think, therefore, produce language according to social representations (beliefs, customs, systems). To elaborate on this assertion, a definition of social facts by Emile Durkheim and contexts in which swearing occurs are elaborated while discussing some implications for experts in language. Nevertheless, in order to limit the scope of the discussion, no distinction of swearing among gender or psychological views are debated, for example the language of men and women, or to attribute utterly, every swearing as introduced above, to social facts, because mental disorders such as Tourette syndrome, dementia, or juvenile gout as causes of coprolalia are also sources of swearing.

**Keywords:** swearing, language, social facts, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, professional communication, representations.

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## **ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЯ РУГАТЕЛЬСТВА В ОБЩЕСТВЕ: СЛЕДСТВИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ ФАКТОВ**

**Аннотация:** В этой статье ругательства обычно изображаются как уничижительные или способ выражения разочарования, обиды или любых подобных чувств, а не просто как результат постоянного несоответствия правилам языка его пользователями в их соответствующей среде, будь то по политическим, социальным или культурным мотивам, но следствие феномена выше их контроля, которые являются социальными фактами. Я утверждаю, что социальные факты, а именно законы, язык, религия, возраст или брак, не поддающиеся контролю со стороны отдельных лиц в природе, хотя и производимые ими коллективно, влияют на то, как люди думают, следовательно, производят язык в соответствии с социальными представлениями (убеждениями, обычаями, системы). Чтобы развить это утверждение, было разработано определение социальных фактов Эмиля Дюркгейма и контекстов, в которых происходит ругательство, при обсуждении некоторых последствий для экспертов по языку. Тем не менее, чтобы ограничить сферу обсуждения, не обсуждается различие в клятве между гендерными или психологическими взглядами, например, язык мужчин и женщин, или, как указывалось выше, приписывают каждое ругательство социальным фактам, поскольку расстройства, такие как синдром Туретта, деменция или ювенильная подагра как причины копролалии, также являются источниками ругательства.

**Ключевые слова:** ругань, язык, социальные факты, лингвистика, антропология, социология, профессиональное общение, представления.

Language could be the subject-matter of almost all social sciences; it is essential that it exists, otherwise, it would be quasi-impossible to decipher the reality of this world; thus, thinking contrarily might become a metaphysical issue which need not be envisaged. Not only can the issue of this article be classified, on a more specific sense, under both linguistics-the scientific study of language (Halliday&Webster, 2003) and anthropology-the study of humans both in the past and present (American Anthropological Association, 2019), but under sociology too, as language has a functional role in the society (Fishman, 1997; 2012) and its symbolic interactionist feature (Cossette, 1998), gives more incentives to study it. For Ludwig Wittgenstein (1961, originally in 1921) language shapes our experiences as far as words and contexts are concerned; Noam Chomsky (1988) as a tool to control dwellers of a society; or for Ferdinand De Saussure (1971, originally in 1916) an arrangement and connection of rules by a social group. Additionally, as pointed earlier, the concept of social facts arises in this paper because very often disobedience, resentment or anger from individuals are the results of a force(s) exerting itself on them whether acquiesce in or not with them. To clarify the latter statement, Durkheim's definition of social facts requires that they be explained.

### **What is a social fact?**

As the founder of sociology, Émile Durkheim (1898), said: «social facts are ways of seeing, ways of feeling, ways of acting, ways of producing, and ways of organizing or sustaining one's life within a social group, a human community or an entire population». According to him, social facts can be defined with four main characteristics: they are *collective*, *stable*, *external* to, and *restrictive* for individuals. If social facts impose themselves on individuals as a reality that transcends them individually, that precedes and survives them, the fact remains that they are exerted, coercively or not, on individuals because those who derogate from what is socially accepted in their milieu, group or society are imposed sanctions that will vary depending on the environment and time. They are also what serge Moscovici (1961) coined as *social representations*. But, in general, individuals do not feel the binding nature of social facts. That is, the education received, and socialization ensures that most individuals have adopted the norms, the traditions of doing things or thinking that are acknowledged in a community. Therefore, individuals or groups who do not conform with the requirements of the group to which they belong, are subject to reprimands, ranging from moral

disapproval to exclusion from their group through a range of intermediate punishments. For example, it is morally and socially recognized that swearing is disparaging and can have some consequences for those who use it in a context (social group) whose norms condemn it: *f-words*, *n-words*, *s-words* and the list goes on. As an illustration of the coercive aspect of language as a social fact, advertising campaigns are good examples; ads which appear to viewers can be considered obscene if they resist the norms of language. Another case might be swearing words from the President of a nation which would definitely be meretricious coming from such a person. For example, the President of the United States Donald Trump with «s\*\*\*-hole» (Malone, 2018), and then ending up denying it owing to the coercive power of social facts, in this case *language*. Additional examples with Elon Musk, Bryan Smith, Daniel Lee, Jamie Dimon and other CEOs of giant companies (Fahey, 2016) with the word «*shit*» which led to some rebukes.

### **Swearing**

Although sociologists and other practitioners in linguistics, anthropology or communication see it as a feature of language derivations within a group or community, it is often little understood. Montagu (2001) argues that it is still an unequivocal form of social behavior without sanctions due to its aspects not allowing much attention on it in social discourse. Perhaps too, due to its variability diverging among cultures and contexts. For instance, while describing a woman in modern societies, using *long legs* might lead to adumbrate a svelte, tall and charming woman. However, for the *Wik Monkan* tribe of the cape York peninsula in Australia, the same expression is considered the most uncivilized and indecent for the same portrayal (pp.13). Swearing can also have more denigrating aspects such as xenophobic, religious or sexual (Hughes, 2015). However, if swearing connotes some negative representations, the expression itself in the earlier centuries was more linked to *oaths* rather than what it is these days (McEnery, 2006). Swearing was destined at religious (blasphemous) or social institutions at first. Thus, to reiterate McEnery's thoughts, swearing still remains an immoral language and should be seen as such, unless one opts for a more specific approach and form of swearing, which it is not my intention. In other words, I simply shed light on the way the representations of swearing have evolved over time by displaying various forms (religious, linguistic, legal, etc.). Consequently, the following elaborations will be encompassing all forms of swearing as such, that is, an immoral language. Another important

aspect of swearing is, it serves as a mean for some age groups to redefine their identities as individuals and persons (Stapleton, 2003), perhaps to express pain or be acknowledged within a group. For example, students at universities interested in art galleries or other vehicles of art might use a more «decent» language than those sitting and drinking a beer in a bar, hence, to sound «cool», be obliged to use such a bad language to show toughness or belongingness to a specific group, as behaving otherwise might lead to rejection. Although this might sound subjective or unfounded, these assumptions are not utterly refutable considering the following case: a senior executive may never swear in public if that implies jeopardizing his/her entire career, it is not the word, I argue, rather the representations of the words, that is, its inference to a social group (lower class), mental issues and stress coping (inability to handle the pressure at work), vulgarity, shame (views of colleagues, peers in the industry) and other outcomes which makes it unthinkable for the executive to utter such words; thus, always reinforcing his/her image (identity), and this can be an unconscious or conscious process continuously constructed.

### **Implications of the analysis of swearing**

Hence, if customs and beliefs as to what is profane or not varies among cultures, from a sociological point of view, what rationale lies behind its relevance (swearing) for sciences? For sociologists, it can be the barometer of some latent issues within the society, either to be prevented or solved. Also, rather than shocking or being appalling for the accepted norms of a group, experts in language studies should approach it from a different stance. In other words, swearing frequency might be a tool to investigate symbolic interactionism which serves as an expression of selves (Taylor, 2012). For example, swearing with the use of graffiti, might help describe the representations the youth has of its society. Thus, because representations are social facts (Rabinow, 1986), which resistance to their coercive aspect causes swearing, they should be considered when one investigates communication issues. Moreover, in media research as put by Birgitta Höijer (2011) the theory of social representations, as reformulated by Serge Moscovici, has influenced researchers from varying disciplines, but is still quite unknown to media researchers, which suggests the unfamiliarity of the theory of representations to analyze the content of language and its evolution within social sciences. A practical use of the representations of swearing would be with PR and marketing specialists, who to sell their products and services may use short films that target, educate or inform the public according to specific age groups by analyzing

the content of the representations of swearing and modifying them to serve productive purposes. Although many studies on representations linked to advertising have been done, their approach have mainly been descriptive and barely related to the theory I present here; thus, for methods and studies on representations see Doise et al. (1995) in «The quantitative analysis of social representations».

However, swearing has existed for decades, so are its representations my proposal aims at encouraging smore studies on swearing with the analysis of the content of representations. All in all, swearing is a complex and interdisciplinary issue as it has been shown. It is an aspect of language; therefore, its study permeates in almost all social sciences. It is a good measure of the well-being of a community. The study of social facts and representations provides some methods that might help investigate the phenomenon of swearing more deeply along with several proposals already elaborated in various sciences.

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